

ARIZONA *Our history* LATINA *Our story* TRAILBLAZERS

Stories of Courage, Hope & Determination

Vol V





Guadalupe Verdugo Huerta

A Voice For Those In Need



Spunky, strong, and saintly are a few words used to describe community advocate Guadalupe Verdugo Huerta. Born in 1921, Guadalupe grew up in the small town of Prescott, Ariz. The death of her father, Loreto, ended her formal education in 7th grade. Her domestic work provided extra income for the family. By 1939, Guadalupe had married New Mexico native Jose Huerta and given birth to her daughter, Marta. Three years later, Guadalupe's life changed: her husband joined the stream of men entering the Army to serve in World War II. Seeking to better her circumstances, Guadalupe reluctantly left her daughter in her mother's care and moved to the Phoenix area, securing a job as a mechanic at Luke Airfield. Knowing that a job in a wartime industry would greatly improve her family's economic situation, she worked long, hard days in cramped spaces repairing airplane fuselages and control

boards; cleaning, oiling and replacing worn parts. She returned home on weekends.

After the war's end, Guadalupe and Jose reunited, but divorced soon after. Guadalupe met and married Jose Maestas in 1951. They moved to Phoenix, eventually settling in the Golden Gate barrio, a Latino neighborhood founded in the 1920s. Guadalupe took her place among thousands of other Mexican American women as a domestic worker and in the commercial laundry industry. While at the Phoenix Laundry and Dry Cleaners in the late 1950s, Guadalupe rallied other Latinas to ask for higher wages, resulting in a raise for the women.

A devoted Catholic, Guadalupe helped raise money for the construction of Sacred Heart Church in Golden Gate. Once the church opened, she faithfully cleaned the building, served generations of children as catechism teacher, and became a spiritual leader as a Crusillo Movement teacher.



Guadalupe's leadership blossomed more fully in the 1970s. After a stroke that left her partially paralyzed, she left the work force and began community work. She joined the board of Chicanos Por la Causa (CPLC), serving from 1978 until 1993. A particular passion was the plight of the elderly, and among other activities she pressured the CPLC board to develop housing for the aging and disabled. This legacy is evident not only in Phoenix's Casa de Primavera and Guadalupe Huerta apartments, but also CPLC housing in other Arizona cities. Though her physical disability and limited mobility often kept her home, she still worked as a champion for the people. As a well known "servant leader," she used her phone and the CPLC network to connect thousands of community members to social services.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the City of Phoenix initiated a highly controversial process to purchase property in Golden Gate for proposed airport and transportation expansion plans. Family after family was uprooted, severing the deep bonds of cultural and community identity. A member of the Community

Protection Action Committee, Guadalupe was a knowledgeable voice at meetings, fighting to ensure that residents received fair market value for their homes. The Sacred Heart Church, a focal point of her life and spirituality, soon faced demolition as the airport inexorably marched into the neighborhood. Her efforts to save the church, along with other families, led to its preservation and eventual designation as a historic landmark. Sacred Heart holds a special place in the hearts of hundreds of families today, functioning as a space where families and friends reunite each year at Christmas.

Guadalupe has demonstrated integrity, caring, and perseverance throughout her life. Guadalupe received numerous awards for her community leadership, including the Hon Kachina Award, Channel 12's Jefferson Award, and Chicanos Por La Causa's Community Service Award. Her philosophy was "Lo que llamo vida es ayudar a otros." (What I call living is helping others.) Although she passed away in 2000, her strong voice and her humble spirit of giving, inspired by deep spirituality, faith and passion for social justice, will long be remembered.



Arizona Latina Trailblazers: Stories of Courage, Hope & Determination
Trailblazer Series Vol V

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Latino Perspectives Magazine and the Raul H. Castro Institute (RCI) are proud to have a role in preserving the significant contributions made by the 2013 Arizona Latina Trailblazers. The mission of Latino Perspectives Magazine is to provoke, challenge, and connect Latinos who are defining, pursuing, and achieving the American Latino Dream. This mission is in concert with the Raul H. Castro Institute's vision to improve the quality of life for the Latino community in Arizona by bringing focus to priority issues of education, health and human services, leadership, and civic engagement – all areas in which these Latina Trailblazers have created a tremendous and lasting impact. Through the use of this book in educational settings and through its availability as part of the Arizona Memory Project, their legacy will be perpetuated as generations of leaders continue to be inspired by the spirit and actions of these pioneering women. It has been a privilege to tell their stories.

Thank you to the following sponsor for making this project possible:

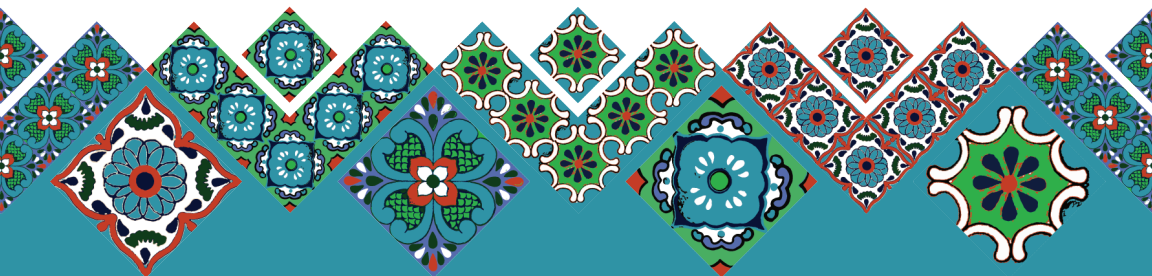


Latinas' Stories Remain Important in Arizona's History

As educators, social workers, labor leaders, entrepreneurs, scholars, judicial representatives, homemakers, nurses, ranch wives, or political representatives, Latinas and Hispanas have long been at the forefront of Arizona's history. It is important that we recognize the impact of their individual contributions, and imperative that their collective stories be recalled and shared.

The life journeys of these women are filled with compelling stories that reflect the strength of their vision, their courageous actions, and their thoughtful advocacy. Their outstanding leadership formed strong cultural cornerstones, laying the foundation for women in leadership roles today.

And so we honor them and all that they represent, pioneers who forged our rich cultural heritage and strong role models.



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